

P102

Artworks provide beauty, therapy

MIN SCHLIEF
likes wheel-work too much to abandon it forever.

In 1985, East Lansing
Susan Hensel's world came
apart around her.
The second that a gar-
bage truck crashed into the rear
of her car as he was on
his way to work one morning,
Susan was thrown from a stable and
her 2-year-old son.
The person family to a
single parent to be both mom
and dad for her 2-year-old son.

LIVELY arts

Although born of necessity, the
hand-formed works take on a
creative life-force of their own.
Using a much heavier porcelain
clay than she used for wheel-
thrown works, Hensel is combin-
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harder-image—a unifying rope
created by a professional version
of the Play-Doh squeeze
machine.

The works have strong
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of the basket, fooling the eye.
The pottery isn't designed
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Hensel is not a production ar-
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Unlike earlier pots which
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struggle with infertility, the cur-
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tragedy.



TRAGEDY REVEALED IN ART—Susan Hensel with pottery for her show. The sketches she's holding are entitled "They Say I'm Too Young to Be a Widow," and "Mother Comforting Child." The necklaces at the bottom left were fashioned by her son.

Towne Courier Photograph/Susan Hensel

Art works

LIVELY arts

whose "upside-down" captured the attention of Tom East Lansing to Hensel felt upside-down. Although one part knew better, Hensel had never do another thing in her life.

you go through a loss we're just numb," she and three days after crash, litigation is still and son J.J.'s social traumas surface but Hensel has battled it all and has no work creativity.

Leading Art Gallery is the results of that by featuring Hensel as Potter of the Month. Hensel's recently will be unveiled this the unique direction has taken is sure to numerous fans.

working in porcelain, taken a spin with and, rather than wheel-works. The change is not Hensel grins that she

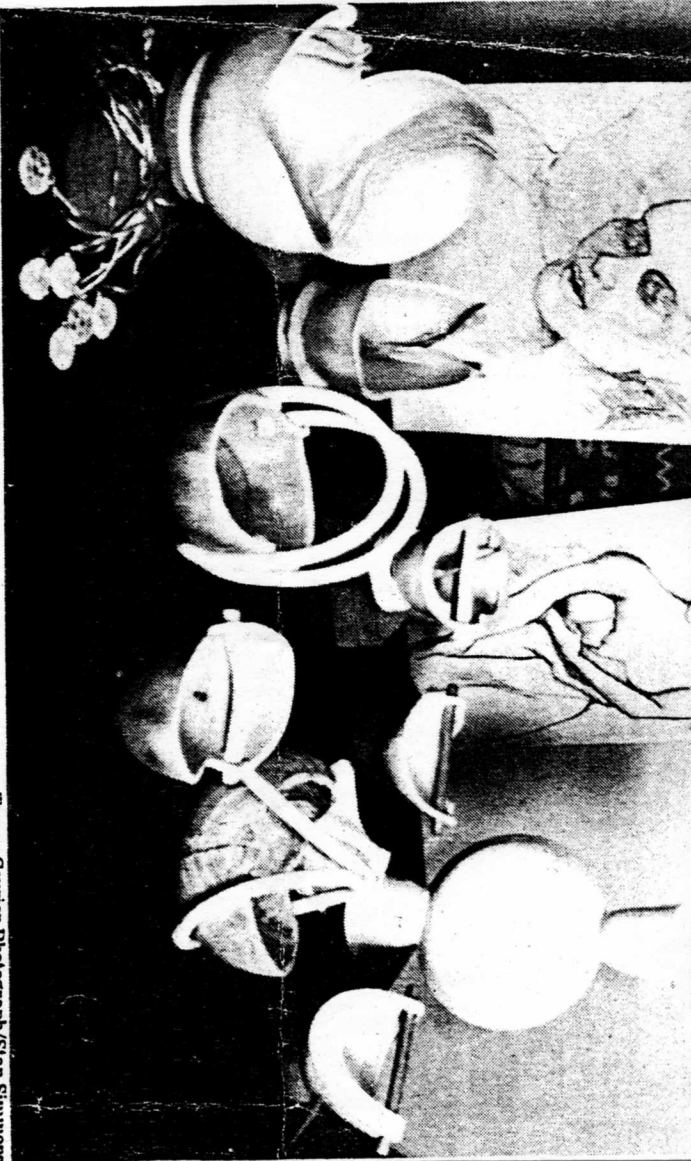
Although born of necessity, the hand-formed works take on a creative life-force of their own. Using a much heavier porcelain clay than she used for wheel-thrown works, Hensel is combining stained basket shapes, with a harder-image—a unifying rope created by a professional version of the Play-Doh squeeze machine.

The works have strong geometric lines, with the ropes "disappearing" beyond the plane of the basket, fooling the eye. The pottery isn't designed necessarily to be functional—Hensel is not a production artist—but those strategically placed ropes are a lifesaver for hopelessly inept flower arrangers.

Unlike earlier pots which reflected Hensel's previous struggle with infertility, the current pottery shows nothing of her struggle to deal with her husband's death.

What DOES illustrate that battle are a startling, painfully personal series of drawings Hensel

SEE ART WORKS,
Page 8



TRAGEDY REVEALED IN ART—Susan Too Young to Be a Widow," and "Mother Hensel with pottery for her show. The sket- Comforting Child." The necklaces at the bottom she's holding are entitled "They Say I'm" some left were fashioned by her son.

Towne Courier Photograph/Sian Simmons

Art works

FROM Page 7

has completed during the last two years. Those drawings, kept together in a huge portfolio, are not part of any show.

They should be, Hensel admits. "It would be a tremendous expense to mount an exhibition (because of framing costs), but they really need to be seen."

Whether in an exhibition or in a book combined with Hensel's insights (all her drawings come with a penciled observation/explanation), the works will hopefully see the light of day someday.

Art as therapy for grief

For now, they provide a private look at how one woman works her way through widowhood, grief, a dual mother-father role, social expectations

and recovery.

J.J. also has a drawing in the portfolio, a profusely labeled depiction of the "Nightmare Well," which could shoot out bad dreams and was so fierce "even Mommy Magic and J.J. magic combined" couldn't make it disappear.

J.J., for whom this past summer was particularly bad in dealing with his dad's death, has been going through counseling. The counselor encouraged the drawings and it was through the artwork that J.J. was able to lay some fears to rest.

The well's grumpy mouth turned to a "smiley" one; good dreams started to take their place along side the bad ones, etc.

Hensel's drawings include one with a series of blocks, each containing a body part. "Everything

is thrown up in the air and comes back in a jumble," she says. The series shows the puzzle being put back together. It doesn't quite fit at first, but it progresses.

A woman with wings shows hope and escape; a figure with one foot on an abyss begins to move away; jumbled wooden dummies snow "now you dont feel real."

The drawings, Hensel assures with a quiet smile are healing, not depressing. Once you get it down on paper, she explains, you have made a tremendous leap in the healing process.

Artworks provide b

BY SHARON SCHLIEF
Staff Writer

On Sept. 27, 1985, East Lansing artist Susan Hensel's world came crashing down around her.

In the split second that a garbage truck crashed into the rear of her husband's car as he was on his way to work one morning, Susan went from a stable and happy three-person family to a widow forced to be both mom and dad to her 2-year-old son.

likes wheel-work too much to abandon it forever.

Illness delayed art work

But the hand-formed artworks came in handy when Hensel was ill with an asthmatic-like illness that prevented her from working long hours uninterrupted at the wheel. It's also handy, she explained, because she's able to leave her work if J.J., now 4 and into making his own art works, demands her attention.

LIVELY arts

A potter whose "upside-down" teapots captured the attention of art fans from East Lansing to Ann Arbor, Hensel felt upside-down herself. Although one part of her likely knew better, Hensel worried she'd never do another creative thing in her life.

"When you go through a loss like that, you're just numb," she explains.

Two years and three days after that fatal crash, litigation is still pending and son J.J.'s psychological traumas surface periodically, but Hensel has battled through it all and has no worries on her creativity.

The Lansing Art Gallery is showing the results of that creativity by featuring Hensel as its October Potter of the Month. Some 10 to 20 of Hensel's recently fired works will be unveiled this week and the unique direction the artist has taken is sure to delight her numerous fans.

Still working in porcelain, Hensel has taken a spin with hand-formed, rather than wheel-thrown works. The change is not exclusive—Hensel grins that she

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Page 8



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KEEP IT
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controlled. To learn how, call us.

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